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THE PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW.

THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF OBLIGATION.

THE limitations of this occasion¹ make it impossible to do more than touch on one or two of the many problems of which one would have a right to expect a treatment in an article bearing such a general title. The distinction made by Kant between two types of the consciousness of obligation is accepted as justified by introspective analysis.² Corresponding to Kant's hypothetical imperative is the consciousness of conditional obligation, and corresponding to his categorical imperative is the consciousness of absolute obligation. Because the hypothetical imperative is conditioned upon the existence of a desire for a certain end, it may be called teleological. On the other hand, the categorical imperative, which to use Kant's words "declares an action to be necessary³ in itself without reference to any purpose, *i. e.* without any other end,"⁴ is non-teleological.

¹ This paper was read in part at the first meeting of the American Philosophical Association, on April 1, 1902.

² To avoid misunderstanding, it should be said at the outset that while this paper accepts the distinction between the conditional and the categorical imperative, it does not accept Kant's definition of the latter. Kant's categorical imperative, as is well known, is not only one which is accepted by the agent as binding without any reference to any end to be attained by acting in accordance with it; but it is also one which is *objectively* necessary, *i. e.*, valid for all rational creatures generally. In this article this latter characteristic is not included in the definition of the categorical imperative, as will be seen below, pp. 340 ff.

³ Kant says "objectively necessary." The reason for the omission of the qualifier is stated in the immediately preceding foot-note.

⁴ *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals*, tr. by Abbott in *Kant's Critique of Practical Reason and other Works on the Theory of Ethics*, 5th Ed., p. 32. Subsequent quotations from Kant are taken from this volume of translations.

An attempt is made in this paper to analyze with some minuteness the consciousness of conditional or teleological obligation, and then to investigate the nature and origin of the consciousness of categorical obligation.

I. The consciousness of teleological or conditional obligation is reasonable, in the sense that a reason can be given by a person for his assertion that he ought to perform an act. The whole complex mental process can be described as follows: 'I want a certain result, and I judge that this act is indispensable if I am to secure that result. Therefore I am conscious that in so far as I am motivated by this desire and directed by my judgment I must in consistency perform the act.'¹ Just as, in a deductive inference, consistency between two judgments requires that a third judgment, called a conclusion, be made; so, in this case, consistency between a desire and a judgment requires a certain act to be performed. The fact that when two judgments are made a third judgment is required in the name of consistency, which is reasonableness, is the fact of logical obligation. When I experience that requirement in my own intellectual life, I say that I ought to pass that judgment. The fact that when a desire and a certain judgment respecting the means of satisfying this desire are present in consciousness, a certain act is required in the name of consistency, which is reasonableness, is the fact of teleological obligation. When I experience that requirement in my practical life, I say that I ought to do that act.

Now there is nothing *a priori* in this requirement of consistency in either case. It is simply a fact ascertained by observation and induction that when *M* is *P*, and *S* is *M*, *S* is also *P*. If any one who has ascertained that fact judges in another way, he is apt to be confronted at once with the memory of other instances in which such a judgment on such premises was inconsistent with the facts. Or, if he has formed a settled habit of judging in such a case that *S* is *P*, to make any other judgment is to go against a habit. Whether, therefore, he is checked by a memory or a

¹ The analysis here given of the consciousness of teleological obligation follows Hume's treatment of the subject, except that reason is here recognized as something more than an analytic function. See Appendix I to his *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Selby-Bigge's edition, pp. 285 ff.

habit, in either case he cannot judge that *S* is *P* without a feeling of uneasiness, of distrust in the judgment. The judgment is not convincing, or, in other words, it is not a real judgment.

In the case of the consciousness of teleological obligation, the process is no more *a priori* than we have found it to be in inference. Inconsistency here is nothing but the observed fact that to desire an end, and not to perform certain actions standing in definite relation to that end, is to court disappointment. Man as desiring and as not securing a certain object is man at odds with his environment. Man as desiring, and yet as not doing what he knows to be necessary for securing a certain object, is man at odds with himself. He is inconsistent. His action does not comport with his desire; and because he knows that there is this incompatibility, his action does not comport with his knowledge. It is irrational.

We must, however, observe that the irrationality spoken of here is concrete and not abstract. It is not the incongruousness of the action with abstract reason, but with a known definite situation which appeals in a certain way to a given desire. Vary the situation or the desire, and the demand of reason, or the obligation varies likewise. The obligation is contingent because reason itself alone cannot create it. This contingency, however, is not peculiar to the rationality of teleological obligation. All theoretical reason is equally contingent. Only when definite premises are given can rationality make a demand; and that demand depends on the nature of the premises. Vary the premises, and the demand varies. But it may be said in objection that while the matter of the demand varies, the form of demanding is constant in the case of theoretical reason. The same statement, however, may be made of teleological obligation. Whatever may be the desire, and whatever may be the known means of gratifying it, there always is, in a thinking being so far as he thinks, the same consciousness of incompatibility between the existence of the desire and a failure to perform the action known to be necessary to satisfy the desire.

And yet a man may reasonably refuse to perform that act in spite of its known incompatibility with that desire. For he may

have other desires, and if the several measures known to be necessary respectively to the satisfaction of the several desires cannot be taken at once, there arises a conflict of obligations. This conflict can be adjusted only when some desire has become supreme over the others. Then the obligation to perform the action which secures its gratification becomes supreme over competing obligations. Reason takes into consideration the ascendancy of this desire, and in this concrete situation decides in favor of that conduct which this desire imposes. It declares that conduct more obligatory than any other possible conduct in this particular complication of circumstances. If it be said that not reason but the brute strength of desire is the decisive factor in the case, the reply is that mere strength of desire may indeed determine action ; it cannot by itself, however, give rise to the consciousness of preponderant obligation. Reason is necessary for that, and the strength of desire operates in the production of that consciousness of obligation only in so far as it is a datum which reason takes into consideration.

Often the part that reason plays in the conflict of motives is still greater ; for it frequently happens that the relative strength of desires is modified by knowledge of the results that follow their gratification. But such knowledge of results is distinguished from mere memory-images of unpleasant experiences, which in the past were associated with the satisfaction of desire. The memory-images arise without any operation of reason ; that is, the process we call reasoning does not occur as an indispensable condition of their appearance. Not so, however, with the knowledge of the relation between an action and its consequences. Such knowledge is gained only through the process of reasoning. Hence any desire whose relative strength varies with this knowledge is in a sense a rational desire. Its distinctive nature as desire is not changed ; it does not cease to be desire because it is rational. As desire it is not reason ; but as a desire which is a function of reason it is a reasonable desire. It is such a desire as only reasoning beings have, and reasoning beings have it only because they reason. Here, again, it is not abstract reason that, out of its own pure reasonableness, gives rise to the

desire ; but the reasoning process of a person with a definite desiderative nature takes place in a concrete situation, and produces a result, of which a definite desire in its particular strength is a part. Such a desire is therefore properly called a concretely reasonable desire.

Now in the case of a conflict of desires, or more properly, because desires themselves do not often conflict, in the case of a conflict of obligations arising from the incompatibility of the means of gratifying different desires, it frequently happens that a concretely reasonable desire is stronger than random, unreasonable desires, and by the process we have above described, gives to a definite obligation supremacy over other concurrent obligations. In such instances it is not sufficient to say that the supreme obligation is supreme simply because reason takes into consideration the supremacy of its correlative desire. One must not lose sight of the fact that the supreme desire is concretely reasonable ; for we have seen that this desire in its present victorious strength would not appear in an unreasoning being. Thus, though the supremacy of the obligation is determined for reason by the supremacy of the desire, this supremacy of the desire has in its turn been determined by the operation of reason. Hence the supremacy of the obligation is doubly a rational supremacy.

In order to avoid a misunderstanding as to the meaning of the word 'desire,' it should be said here that by desire is meant not merely an 'animal desire,' but any desire whatever, including the highest¹ aspirations which men may entertain. These aspirations are toward the realization of ideals ; and because of the importance of this fact perhaps it is pardonable to interrupt the argument for the sake of considering the way in which ideals control human action. The word 'ideal' is used in many senses, but for the present purpose an ideal can be defined by the mention of three characteristics. First, an ideal is an object of imagination or an idea, and like all objects of imagina-

¹ It does not lie within the scope of this paper to discuss the meaning of the terms 'high' and 'low' as applied to desires. The distinction expressed by these terms is recognized, and demands consideration in any full treatment of morality.

tion it is limited in the quality of its sensuous content by actual perception, past and present. In the second place, an ideal is an idea of human achievement, whether in the way of skill or of character or of external condition, such as for instance social institutions. An ideal may of course be an idea of some condition not attainable or capable of approximation by human exertion, but such an ideal has no direct influence on human action. Finally, an ideal is, for the person who cherishes it, an idea which he desires and more or less persistently strives to realize, or at least to bring as near to realization as actual conditions permit. It is this third characteristic of an ideal which makes it so powerful a factor in human life. Were there no desire to realize an ideal, it would be only an inoperative idea. The desire to realize an ideal is due to the nature of the ideal ; but that nature is in its turn due to the selective part played by desires in the original formation of the ideal. Only those elements in past or present experience, which for one reason or another a person desires to have repeated, enter into the ideal which that person forms for himself. But not everyone forms an ideal for himself ; many adopt the ideals of others—a fact largely due to a natural tendency of human beings to desire what others desire. This tendency is strikingly shown in the case of children, who most easily catch from their associates the infection of some particular desire. And, like children, adults also not only imitate others's actions, but adopt their ends. This adoption of others's ends as one's own consists in the awakening of desires within us to secure these ends. Ideals, like any other ends, are adopted when we come to desire their realization. Once these desires for the realization of ideals have been awakened in us, they give rise to a consciousness of obligation to perform the actions known to be necessary to that realization. Thus it is seen that there is nothing peculiar about the obligation imposed by an ideal, which should differentiate it from other teleological obligations. Persons who cherish ideals will recognize an obligation to realize them—an obligation whose strength¹ is proportional to the strength of the desire to realize.

¹ This strength may be reinforced by the fact that the action necessary to realize an ideal may itself have been categorically demanded of us by others ; in other words,

Persons who do not cherish the ideal will not recognize the teleological obligation, although the act which would be imposed as teleologically obligatory by the ideal may be imposed upon them as categorically obligatory by a process we shall consider in the sequel.¹

II. Up to this point we have been examining only teleological obligation, where, to quote again Kant's phrase, "the action is not commanded absolutely, but only as means to another purpose." Kant, however, in this passage goes on to say: "There is an imperative which commands a certain conduct immediately, without having as its condition any other purpose to be attained by it. This imperative is Categorical."² That there are categorical imperatives corresponding to this definition³ any unbiased observer of human experience must concede. Any attempt to deny the fact is simply an obstinate refusal to see a fact because one has no theory to fit it. Too many persons recognize and act upon such imperatives to leave the matter open to question. These categorical imperatives admit of no description in terms of other experience, that is, in terms intelligible to one who has not experienced them. They must be felt in order to be appreciated. To those, however, who have heard their promptings, the experience may be adequately described by saying that in consciousness arises a command, "Thou shalt," or "Thou shalt not," the teleological obligation may be reinforced by a coincident categorical obligation, whose nature will be discussed below. It may be mentioned here that not only may categorical and teleological obligations reinforce each other, but at times they may weaken each other by mutual opposition.

¹ For instance one man may have as an element in his ideal an exalted sexual purity; he may desire above all things to be sexually clean, and he will in consequence be conscious of an obligation to abstain from every lascivious thought or act because of its incompatibility with his ideal. Another person who does not appreciate the fascination of this ideal, who, that is, has no positive desire to be pure in heart, may yet feel a strong obligation to avoid licentious behavior because of the insistence with which he has been constantly forbidden to be lewd. The latter person may gradually come to cherish the ideal of purity; but when he does, the character of the obligation under which he acts will have changed. The process of change from categorical to teleological obligation is very interesting but cannot be investigated here.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 33.

³ In this definition, observe that nothing is said of the rational necessity and the objective validity of the imperative.

and that the command is accompanied by no indication that there is any ulterior end to be gained by obedience. Not only is the command heard, but its authority is recognized. The mandate or the prohibition may be regarded by the person who feels it not as an impertinence, not as an arrogant usurpation of a right, but as a justifiable peremptoriness, and as entitled to its assumption of dictatorship. He may be disposed to rebel against it, but he does not question its rightful claim to exact submission of him. Such a categorical imperative, recognized by the agent as binding, there undoubtedly is, and it is idle to attempt to ignore its existence.

But Kant's statement that such an imperative "concerns not the matter of the action, or its intended result, but its form and the principle of which it is itself a result,"¹ is not true of all categorical imperatives which come under the definition we have above given. Kant's statement is true of *his* categorical imperative, simply because he has defined that imperative in such a way as to carry with it the truth of that statement. But the difference between Kant's treatment of the subject and that given here is not merely a difference of definition. There is also the question of the exhaustiveness of Kant's division of imperatives into two types, when one of these types is defined as he defines it. Either Kant's definition is too narrow or his division is defective. For there are imperatives which are accepted by human beings as unconditionally binding on them, and yet which are not "objectively necessary" in the sense of being "valid, not merely for men, but for all *rational creatures generally*."² Kant does not provide for these in his classification, and yet the fact is that their name is legion. An appeal to the past history of morality is not necessary to prove their existence. We need look only at the moral consciousness of our own times and of our friends and associates; most of us need look only at our own moral experience, either of the present moment or of our earlier years before we began to reflect on these subjects.

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 33.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 25; italics are quoted. In this passage, Kant speaks of "law" not of "categorical imperative," but he practically identifies the two, making only the distinction that an imperative is a *formula* of a command or law (*op. cit.*, p. 30). This distinction makes no difference to our present discussion.

Perhaps there are some persons who were never commanded or forbidden to do any act without having had a reason given for the injunction. In such persons it is possible¹ that there is no consciousness of categorical obligation to performances and omissions except that of the Kantian sort. One is probably safe in assuming that such persons form a minority of mankind. Whether this assumption is justified or not, there are at least some men who are conscious of categorical obligations which are not objectively valid, and the categorical imperatives these men recognize must not be omitted from any complete classification of imperatives. It is necessary, therefore, either to re-define the conception of the categorical imperative, or to admit into our classification a third kind, which is neither teleological nor categorical, and then give it a name. Out of deference to Kant's epoch-making work, probably we should allow his terminology to stand. In this case we should have to cast about for a new term, and every one is at liberty to make his own choice. Perhaps the word 'positive,' already by long usage sanctioned as designative of a certain class of laws imposed by human command, might be as good as any, if the view advocated below, as to the psychological origin of the imperatives under consideration, is correct. In this paper the term 'categorical' is used as a designation of all imperatives which are not conditional in the Kantian sense.

If time permitted, it would be interesting to examine in detail the inexorable logic which forced Kant, with his definition of the categorical imperative, to depart, in his *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals*, from the critical method which characterizes his *Critique of Pure Reason*. We can, however, only treat this point very briefly. In the *Critique*, as every one knows, Kant started with the empirical fact that men pass true theoretical judgments which are not analytical. Calling these

¹ This would depend upon the tenaciousness of their memory. If they remember that every law they have come to recognize as binding either has its reason in some further purpose to be realized, or is the demand to treat humanity in every case as an end withal, never as a means only, they would not, so far as I can see, have a consciousness of categorical obligation different from that described by Kant. How many such persons there are, each one can guess for himself.

judgments by the term "*a priori*"¹ synthetic," he then asks the question how *a priori* synthetic judgments are possible, and arrives at the conclusion that they are possible only if there are pure forms of perception and pure categories of thought, which by functioning in experience give rise to these judgments. Hence these forms of perception and these categories of thought must, so he argues, be accepted as realities. This type of argument is readily recognized as a constructive hypothetical syllogism. 'If *a priori* synthetic judgments exist, then there are pure forms of perception and categories. *A priori* synthetic judgments do exist. There are then,' etc. The minor premise is vouched for as a fact of experience. If it were not, the whole argument would be null and void. A similar argument, in ethical speculation, would read somewhat as follows: 'If there are categorical imperatives in the moral life, then there must be certain pure principles of practical reason. But there are such categorical imperatives. Therefore,' etc. The minor premise, again, would, after the analogy of the argument in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, be vouched for as a fact of experience.

But Kant denies that the truth of the minor premise is or ever can be established by experience. "We must never leave out of consideration," says he, "that we *cannot* make out *by any example*, in other words empirically, whether there is such an imperative at all"² as the imperative of morality; "but it is rather to be feared that all those which seem to be categorical may yet be at bottom hypothetical. . . . But in such a case the so-called moral imperative, which as such appears to be categorical and unconditional, would in reality be only a pragmatic precept, drawing our attention to our own interests, and merely teaching us to take these into consideration."² The consequence of this denial is obvious. Another method of procedure is necessary. Instead of taking categorical imperatives as given in actual moral experience, "we shall therefore have to investigate *a priori*

¹ The question whether these judgments are really *a priori* cannot be discussed here.

² *Op. cit.*, pp. 36 and 37; italics are in the original. This passage is only one of several in the work under consideration, which deny the possibility of empirically proving the existence of categorical imperatives. For another, see p. 24, *op. cit.*

the possibility of a categorical imperative, as we have not in this case the advantage of its reality being given in experience.”¹ This Kant proceeds to do by showing that if there be such an imperative it must be this: “Act only on that maxim whereby thou canst at the same time will that it should become a universal law.”² With this insight “we have not yet, however, advanced so far as to prove *a priori* that there actually is such an imperative.” He goes on to make good this default. All this procedure is necessitated by defining moral duty so as to make inevitable the doubt whether any one is ever dutiful.

Thus we see that whereas in theoretical matters we have a Kantian metaphysics based on the critical examination of actual experience in order to find its implications, in practical matters we have a Kantian ethics based on metaphysics and without any empirical support whatever.³ It is not surprising, therefore, that while the limited contents of Kant’s theoretical metaphysics are objects of knowledge, the very rich contents of his practical metaphysics appeal only to faith. *If* we are to have morality, we must have God, freedom, and immortality; but nobody knows whether there be such a thing as morality or no—a rather startling thesis for a work on morals! One would think it were better to accept morality as a fact, and then ask what manner of fact it is. The actual morality we see in the world may not be ideal; much of it may even be without God and without hope of immortality, and all of it may be without Kantian freedom; but such as it is, it is infinitely preferable to the rigoristic ideal which gives us only a problematic morality upon which to rest God, freedom, and immortality, all likewise problematic.

Now the morality we are empirically acquainted with is often of a positively imperative type. It appears in this person and in that with uncompromising imposition—no ‘If,’ or ‘But,’ or ‘Because,’ but plain ‘Do,’ or ‘Do not,’ ‘Be,’ or ‘Be not.’

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 37.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 38. The question whether the argument in the *Critique of Practical Reason* is the same as that we have examined above, can merely be asked here without any attempt at an answer, for lack of time.

³ Not even the *positive* support of the theoretical metaphysics, which rests on experience.

Its form is categorical, its content is various. Although it has an end in view, that end is mere conformity to a mandatory rule. It has no further end, and hence we have called it non-teleological. It is short-sighted; one step at a time is enough for it, but that step is for it a matter of paramount importance. Heaven or hell may hang upon the issue, but heaven or hell do not count. The step, the whole step, and nothing but the step—that is the alpha and the omega of the categorical imperative.

Some persons have interpreted such an empirical categorical imperative as carrying with it always the sense of the transcendent importance of the *form* of obligation, in comparison with the *content*, as if the obligation and not the act were supremely obligatory. This, however, does not seem to be a true account of the normal consciousness of bounded duty, although in some cases the account applies. Just as a reflective logician may make an assertion which has as its matter the mere form of that assertion, *e. g.*, “This judgment is affirmative”; so a reflective moral agent who recognizes categorical obligations may come to recognize the recognition of categorical obligation as itself a matter of categorical obligation. He may say: ‘As a matter of fact I acknowledge the categorical obligation of abstaining from murder, adultery, theft, false witness, and covetousness. But even if I did not recognize these specific abstentions as obligatory, still I should be under obligation to recognize some other concrete obligation, even though, like a Moloch worshipper’s, that obligation were that I should give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul. It is not so much *what* I conceive to be my absolutely inevitable duty, as *that* I should acknowledge some such duty.’ Such an attitude seems actually to be taken by some moral agents, and therefore it must be psychologically possible; but surely it is a travesty of the ordinary consciousness of categorical obligation to represent it as always appearing in this reflective type, which makes the form of obligation the matter of it also; just as it would be a travesty of ordinary thinking to say that every categorical judgment we make concerns the form of assertion. That the judgment has this form is unmistakable, else it would not be a categorical judgment.

So every categorical imperative has *eo ipso* a form of categoricity; but what is of moment to the moral agent is not the mere form of categorical imperativeness but the content in that form. To the moral scientist, on the contrary, the form rather than the content is at one time of main interest, while at another time the interest centers in the content.

But it may be maintained that, although to the normal moral agent the content in the form of categorical obligation is the important thing, to the ethical scientist, on the contrary, the form is more important than the matter, because only by an analysis of the form can the import of such a consciousness be understood. By the import of the categorical imperative is here meant the bearing it has upon the problem of objective reality. This raises the question whether the existence of the consciousness of categorical obligation involves the existence of an objectively valid obligation, in the sense of an obligation resting upon all rational beings as such, independently of their desires.

We have seen that the consciousness of teleological obligation has reference to the relation objectively existing between an action, its known result, and the desiderative attitude the agent takes toward that result. Does the consciousness of categorical obligation have like reference to some objective fact? This question can be answered only by interrogating that consciousness to see whether there always and necessarily is such a reference. There is without doubt generally so much reference as is involved in an attitude toward an act to be performed or omitted, or toward a disposition to be cultivated or suppressed. In all except pathological cases, to feel a categorical obligation is to feel it with reference to some performance or disposition, just as, in all except pathological cases, to feel anger is to feel it towards some object. But the very fact that there are pathological cases in which there is an unobjective categorical obligation or an unobjective emotion, would seem to differentiate the objectiveness of categorical obligation and of emotion from the objectiveness of judgment. For it is doubtful whether even in the most extreme cases of alienation a man can judge without judging about anything. If a person were to affirm that he did, I should not know how to

interpret his affirmation. It would have no meaning for me. But a sense of obligation not binding to anything, or an emotion not directed toward anything, I am able to understand in terms of my own experience. How much this unintelligibility of one alleged experience, and the intelligibility of the other two, count toward making it probable that a consciousness of categorical obligation or of anger is not necessarily objective must be left for the reader to decide. There seems, at any rate, to be a radical difference between the two sorts of objectivity—so much that without more ado we have no right to assert that the mere existence of the consciousness of categorical obligation is of itself an indication of an objective bindingness of *some* unconditional commands. It would be difficult to say, why if I am not able to argue from the existence of anger to the existence of something objectively exasperating, *i. e.*, exasperating to all rational beings, I should be allowed to argue from the existence of categorical obligation to the existence of some course of conduct objectively binding, *i. e.*, binding on all rational beings. Even an appeal to the fact that in many persons obligations appear as binding not merely on themselves, but also on all rational creatures, does not prove anything to the point. It is quite possible that the universality of reference may be an error due to prejudice or to some other cause. The appeal, on the other hand, to the fact that categorical obligations may be recognized as particular in their incidence, may be cited to prove that it does not lie in the very nature of the consciousness of categorical obligation to be universal or objectively necessary. Hence any claim in behalf of a necessary objectivity of reference lays upon the claimant the burden of proof; and satisfactory proof seems to be wanting.

The result of our investigation into the nature of the categorical imperative is that it is a consciousness of unconditional obligation which in normal cases has reference to some more or less definitely conceived action or disposition, but which only in certain instances is regarded by the subject experiencing it as binding not only on himself but on all other human or on all other rational beings. And even in these instances the mere fact that the subject considers the obligation universal does not prove its universality.

Now, assuming that this result is warranted by the facts, let us proceed to ask how categorical imperatives arise in individual consciousness. What is the probable ontogenetic explanation of them? What I shall attempt to show is that two different processes, both known actually to take place, can account for such imperatives, and that in all probability both processes play a part in giving rise to the consciousness of unconditional obligation.

The teleological obligation we have already discussed has, as we have seen, its origin in the knowledge that a certain kind of act is necessary to the satisfaction of a desire. We say to ourselves: 'Do this because you want that.' According to what we know of the tendency of reasoning processes to abbreviation by ellipsis, it is antecedently probable that we may gradually come to say to ourselves simply, 'Do this,' without giving as a reason the fact that 'we want that.'¹ It is thus conceivable that after a time the reason may be lost sight of entirely while yet the obligatory character of the act remains. Nay, further, not only do we often forget our reasons for our beliefs, but we often forget that we ever had any reasons, and come eventually to treat what was once a reasoned conviction as a self-evident truth. Without doubt many, if not all, so-called self-evident truths had this origin. Why may not likewise a teleological obligation, once accepted as binding because teleological, become by the same process of forgetting the reasons which determined its acceptance and by forgetting that there ever were any such reasons—why may not such an obligation finally become a duty regarded as self-evidently reasonable? That such a change actually occurs, especially in the gradual growth from childhood to maturity, can hardly be disproved. Münsterberg, in his *Ursprung der Sittlichkeit*, claims that this change is impossible, because the interest in the teleological imperative is concentrated on the end to be gained, and this interest would always keep the end in view. This is surely not in accordance with our general experience. When a thing is to be done, for whatever end, the interest often shifts from the end to the means.

¹ This explanation is, of course, by no means new.

Interests are not eternal and unchangeable ; on the contrary, they have a way of dancing attendance upon the race to be run rather than of standing by the far off goal.

It may however be very properly questioned whether the economical tendency to mental short-hand is in very large measure responsible for the categorical imperative. The reason for this doubt is that we can point to another agency which is omnipresent in human society, and is sufficiently powerful unaided to produce the consciousness of categorical obligation, although it is in all probability frequently reinforced in its working by the elliptical tendency already mentioned. The agency here referred to is of an altogether different order from those at work in producing teleological imperatives. Whereas reason is operative in the one case, it has a very subordinate part in the other.¹ The process is non-rational, and the obligation to which it gives rise is therefore non-rational.

The word of command exerts on the consciousness of the person to whom it is addressed an influence which has often been dwelt on by moralists, especially those of the English school. But a faulty psychology led them to give only a half-explanation of this fact. Spencer's attitude here is characteristic. "The element of coerciveness," he says, "originates from experience of those several forms of restraint that have, as above described, established themselves in the course of civilization—the political, religious, and social. To the effects of punishments inflicted by law and public opinion on conduct of certain kinds, Dr. Bain ascribes the feeling of moral obligation. And I agree with him," continues Spencer, "to the extent of thinking that by them is generated the sense of compulsion which the consciousness of duty includes, and which the word obligation indicates."² It is clear that what Spencer and his predecessors have in mind is the effect that commands have by reason of the sanctions attached

¹ Without rationality there can be no intelligent interpretation of commands ; but reason does not seem to have anything to do with the sense of constraint which these commands awaken in the hearer, unless some teleological element complicates the situation, as when fear of punishment or desire of reward coöperates with the natural tendency of command to coerce the will.

² *Principles of Ethics*, § 46.

to them. They conceive that commandments get their binding character because of the 'reasons annexed' to them, and that these reasons consist in threats. Now there is no doubt that commands do get an efficacy in this way, and that gradually, as we have seen, commands with reasons annexed tend to become absolute in their obligation. But commands have another influence, the direct influence of 'suggestion.' Recent psychology has thrown much light upon this fact of suggestion by bringing it into relation with certain hypnotic phenomena. It has long been well known that the hypnotic subject is almost absolutely under the control of the will of the hypnotizer. The mere fact that the latter issues a command determines the will of the former to obey. The suggestion works not because of a reason given, but directly and immediately. The psychological explanation of this fact seems to be that the idea suggested in the command takes, because of the concentration of the attention of the subject on it, complete possession of the field of consciousness and leads by ideo-motor action to the execution of the deed commanded. But however this may be, there is no question of the fact that a command of the hypnotizer is answered in most cases by an obedient surrender of the subject. If this surrender is made in light hypnosis, the subject understands that he is acting under a sense of obligation because he has been ordered to act.

The significance of all this for our discussion is clear, although so far as I know it has not been pointed out before. We have in hypnosis 'a pure case' of the general principle that command exercises coercive power over the will. In ordinary consciousness, on the contrary, this coercive force is generally offset by various other influences, and is therefore overlooked. When I am ordered not to do a thing which I have a strong inclination to do, the tendency of the order to secure its own execution may perhaps be imperceptible because of a strong and effective counteracting influence. Again, conscious subjection to another's will is often resented, and a victorious tendency to assert oneself against such control is put into play; this 'contrariness' may ultimately dispossess direct suggestion of all its power. But however much this natural coercive tendency of command to

secure obedience may be overborne by opposing forces, it is without doubt a powerful factor in determining action.

If the same command is constantly repeated, its power to coerce the will increases, especially if its strongest constant opponents are kept in check by counter-inducements. For instance when I keep on saying to my child, "You must tell the truth," and when the temptations to lying are offset by fear of punishment and by desire to secure my approbation, the power of my command to secure obedience asserts itself more and more—always provided, of course, that 'contrariness' is not aroused or when aroused is effectually subdued. Obedience comes more and more to be a matter of course; truth-telling merely because truth-telling is commanded grows to be a fixed trait of the child's character. The process may be very gradual, for in normal life the mills of suggestion often grind slowly; but this is compensated for by the fact that they grind exceedingly small. When the work is done, the very thought of a lie will immediately call up in consciousness it may be the still small voice, it may be the thundering tones of the inexorable command, "Speak the truth." The accent is no longer that of the father from whom the child used to hear it. It has been heard so often, in so many varying tones, from so many persons in authority, that the personal and individual characteristics of the many past pronouncements have fused into what seems a universal form of utterance. The boy is not psychologist enough to know why this word of imperious command emerges in his consciousness, and under the influence of popular conceptions he refers it to a mysterious faculty of conscience, or to a *daimon*, or to the whisperings of ministering angels, or to God's voice sounding in man's soul. We all know the opening words of that great ode: "Stern Daughter of the Voice of God!" This is effective poetry, but no less fanciful than when, in his apostrophe to duty, the poet goes on to sing:

"Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong;

And the most ancient heavens, through Thee, are fresh and strong."

Duty is the daughter of the voice of God only in the sense that in theistic communities the moral law is laid down to us in our

tender years as the expression of God's will. We of Christian or Hebrew ancestry are taught at our mothers' knees that God spake all these words, saying, Thou shalt not. The catechism, the Sunday-school, the pulpit, and various other tuitionary devices enforce the lesson by iteration and reiteration till at last tuition produces intuition. Precept upon precept is accompanied by line upon line, until at last there is in the pupil an inability to divide asunder precept and line: until, that is, there arises an incurability of conviction that the moral law as reasonable and obligatory can only be the fiery law that went forth from the right hand of Jehovah when he came forth from Sinai and rose up from Seir and shined forth from Mount Paran and came with ten thousands of saints.

In a Buddhist community, on the other hand, the moral law is inculcated, and therefore is received as a system of precepts which Gautama in his enlightenment discovered and preached as the way of deliverance for men who are bound upon the wheel of things. In more primitive societies, the moral law is nothing but the expression of immemorial custom, made mandatory by the insistence with which every member of the social circle exacts conformity to established usage. It is taught and it is learned and obeyed as the law of the fathers, as the ancient landmark which is not to be removed.

These differences of intuition as to the authorship of the moral law show that the answer of the moral consciousness as to the source of unconditional obligation may not be accepted as definitive. A scientific examination of the facts is necessary, and in the light of what has been said it is perhaps not overbold to suggest that in each person the moral law as a categorical imperative is in large measure the reverberating echo of commands imposed upon him by those who were in a position to drive them home. The fact that these commands are also respected and loyally obeyed by one's fellows adds to the objectivity which characterizes many categorical imperatives.

Our conclusion, therefore, is that analytically there are two forms of the consciousness of obligation, the conditional and the absolute. If, however, we look at their genesis as well as at their developed character, we must say that there are three types

the analytically teleological imperative in which the obligation is seen to be conditioned upon a desire; the analytically categorical but genetically teleological and conditional imperative, which originally secured its recognition because of its teleological bearings, but in which the obligation is no longer recognized as conditioned upon a desire; and, lastly, the analytically and genetically categorical imperative which is accepted because it is part of our nature to feel that we ought dutifully to submit when others insist that we shall. The first is reasoned, the second has been reasoned, the third never was.

The limits of this paper make it impossible to discuss the question what first gave form to the commands now categorically imposed on the members of society. Nor can we dwell on the conflict which arises when a man becomes so independent as to challenge their authority, and endeavors to throw off the yoke of what appears to be an unwarrantable despotism, and to swear allegiance to the constitutional law of the teleological imperative. This endeavor is the meaning of egoistic hedonism, of utilitarianism, and of perfectionism. Let me remark, however, in closing, that if the contentions of this paper are justified, this struggle against the absolute imperative is the effort of reason to reduce the natural but unreasoning impulse to blind obedience. To change our figure, the law as a categorical imperative is our schoolmaster to control the unchartered freedom of chance desires, a freedom that marks the youth of the individual and of the race. But when the years have come that bring the philosophic mind, the schoolmaster gives way to the ripe man, and the law of the categorical imperative, which is the law of bondage, makes room for the law of the conditional, reasonable imperative, which is the law of freedom. Positive morality yields to a teleological morality with much the same content. But even then teleology is not explicitly present in all consciousness of obligation. It is rather a court of appeals than an omnipresent mentor. In normal cases the teleologically moral man does not constantly think of the end to be gained by his moral conduct. Categoricalness is not replaced but merely outranked by teleology.

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